WORLD CHRONICLE

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PROGRAMME: **"WORLD CHRONICLE"**

GUEST: Yves Fortier, Ambassador of Canada to the United Nations, co-Chairman Planning Committee for the World Summit for Children

JOURNALISTS: Robert Cohen, Latin America Feature Service
Judy Lessing, Radio New Zealand
Ted Morello, Christian Science Monitor

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

SYNOPSIS

World Summit for Children

Yves Fortier, Canada's Ambassador to the United Nations, and co-Chairman of the Planning Committee for the World Summit for Children, discusses the agenda of the Summit which is to be held on September 29th and 30th at U.N. Headquarters in New York. Amb. Fortier believes that the Summit can help to highlight the plight of children in all countries, whether developing or developed. It will also focus its attention on committing world leaders to giving top priority to the needs of children in the decade ahead.

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VOICE From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **WORLD CHRONICLE** an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **WORLD CHRONICLE.**

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is **WORLD CHRONICLE.**

Despite major gains in health care for children in the 1980s, malnutrition, ill health and poverty among children were advancing again as the decade ended. Social expenditures declined in the developing world as governments allocated half their total budgets to the military and to servicing external debt. Now, heads of state and prime ministers have decided to try acting in concert to reverse this trend and protect the lives and growth of children. A World Summit for Children will be held at the United Nations in New York on September 29th and 30th. Its sole purpose is to give children a better chance in life.

Our guest today, Yves Fortier, Ambassador of Canada to the United Nations, is Co-Chairman of the Planning Committee for the World Summit for Children. Amb. Fortier will be interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: Robert Cohen of the Latin America Feature Service; Judy Lessing of Radio New Zealand; and Ted Morello of the Christian Science Monitor.

For some background information, here's a report from our correspondent, Steve Whitehouse.

WHITEHOUSE: Every day more than 450,000 children are born. The 1990s will see a surge in the number of births. 1.5 billion children are expected to be born before the end of the century.

Growing up should be a time of security and contentment but for all too many children this is an unobtainable ideal. The reality for many millions of children is grim. UNICEF, the U.N. Children's Fund, estimates that 40,000 children under the age of five die each day in developing countries, largely from preventable causes.

Malnourishment is the main factor. One out of every three children under five in the Third World, that's more than the entire population of Brazil, goes to bed hungry. Their weakened bodies easily succumb to diseases such as diarrhoea and measles. Health clinics, few in comparison with the population, are usually poorly equipped. There's an acute shortage of medical personnel.

The majority of these deaths are avoidable. We already have practical and affordable solutions to the health and nutrition needs of the world's children. For only $1.20 per child some 1 1/2 million lives were saved in 1988 alone. This, the result of immunization against major childhood diseases.

Educational opportunities vital to the full development of children are declining as a result of the debt crisis in the Third World and consequent government cutbacks. The percentage of children enrolled in school actually dropped in at least half of the developing countries during the 1980s.

These traditional problems remain unresolved. Meanwhile new challenges are facing coming generations. Millions of children are dying each year from the effects of air and water pollution. Unless the environmental threat is addressed promptly environmental related diseases may become the scourge of the next century.

Increasingly, large number of young people are drawn to drugs. The deadly effects of narcotics are eroding the foundation of the next generation. Moreover, the AIDS epidemic is threatening to wipe out all the progress made in child survival. Funerals are daily events in many villages. Millions of children are expected to die or be orphaned by the disease.

With the twentieth century in its last decade and the recent easing of international tension, leaders from around the globe will join together to resolve some of the universal problems that children encounter in surviving and developing to adulthood.

The upcoming World Summit for Children which is to be held at U.N. Headquarters will focus its attention on committing nations to mobilize resources to give top priority to the needs of children, the foundation of tomorrow's world.

LITTLEJOHNS: Amb. Fortier, how did this idea of a summit on the problems of children develop? Whose initiative was it at the start?

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FORTIER: Well to give credit where credit is due Michael, the Executive Director of UNICEF, Jim Grant, in his annual report on the state of the children of the world in December '88 first floated the idea that there should be a summit of world leaders to focus exclusively on children. This was at a time when the negotiations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child were going along their merry way and proceeding towards what eventually became as you know in November of 1989, the adoption of the Convention by the General Assembly.

LITTLEJOHNS: The Convention on the Rights of the Child?

FORTIER: Convention on the Rights of the Child yes was adopted unanimously. This is a landmark international instrument insofar as children are concerned and there were many countries which took an active interest in and participated very constructively in the elaboration of the Convention. Amongst others, six -- I refer to my own country Canada, Mexico, Egypt, Mali, Sweden and Pakistan -- and the leaders of these six countries were approached by Jim Grant and he encouraged them to consider the possibility of acting as co-initiators of a summit for children. Each one of those leaders appointed a personal representative, a sherpa -- I was designated by Prime Minister Mulroney -- and in the summer and the fall of '89 we met, we considered whether or not this was an idea whose time had come or whether it was just a pie in the sky kind of a dream and in the fullness of time the six leaders of these countries formed a conclusion. Independently of one another they said, Yes, let us be initiators. Let us invite our peers to a world summit and let's not make this an extravagant summit. Let us see whether or not the Secretary-General of the United Nations would accept to lend us his house so that ....

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean his Headquarters?

FORTIER: His Headquarters yes, so that we could stage the summit there and as I said do it at reasonable cost and eventually the Governing Board of UNICEF endorsed the idea, we called on the Secretary-General who was enthusiastically in favour of the concept of a summit and he acceded to the request of the six initiating leaders that on their behalf he should send an invitation to all the heads of state and heads of government of members of the United Nations or one of its agencies.

LITTLEJOHNS: Amb. Fortier, I understand there could be as many as 100 presidents, prime ministers and so on at this summit meeting, what can the summiteers do as a result of the meetings here in New York that they couldn't do independently anyway?

FORTIER: Well, you've mentioned a number and I think it is important to say that those of us who have been associated with the project since its inception did make predictions as to how many leaders would accept the invitation of our presidents and prime ministers. The most optimistic ones, and I was one of them, thought that maybe we could get between 30-35. We, as you know, are now looking at the personal presence in New York the weekend of September 29, of anywhere between 75-100 leaders. This is the first time ever that there has been gathered under one roof leaders of East, West, North, South to focus the attention of the world, at the highest political level, on children, to raise the consciousness of the international community on the plight of children, to try and obtain that every president or every prime minister who after all has a great deal of influence which he or she can bring to bear on the legislative decisions of his or her country, will give first

call, will give first attention in drafting legislation and taking executive decisions to children -- the effect of environmentally related legislation for example on children, the effect of AIDS, drugs related legislation on children. They believe that it is extremely important to send a message and that it is not enough to just say in Ottawa or in Islamabad or in Washington we are doing something but it is important to say to the world, look we care enough to come to New York to meet with our peers, to converse about the future of children, to see what we can do together and I think it's a very exciting idea indeed and we're all very thrilled with the momentum which the Summit has generated because there were a lot of cynics at the beginning I should tell you Michael. There were many cynics, even within our midst, as to whether or not this would not be seen as a stunt, whether or not this would not be seen as a show and I may be anticipating some questions ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Photo opportunity.

FORTIER: A photo opportunity. I don't want to anticipate some of the questions which your panelists will be asking but still I'll say this. Yes, in part it is a show but it's much more than that because these people, these leaders, do show that they care, do show that they want to do something, that they want to put their John Doe on a declaration which we expect will result from the summit and a specific plan of action of what is going to happen nationally and what is going to happen internationally.

COHEN: Mr. Ambassador, in addition to this joint declaration and plan of action which you've just mentioned, do you expect individual leaders or groupings of leaders at the Summit to use the occasion to announce specific initiatives, for example debt swaps for child survival or investment of portions

of the so-called peace dividend for children's welfare? I know that you cannot say in advance what has not been announced but is there something that the organizers hope for, announcements of specific initiatives?

FORTIER: I would be less than honest if I answered your question in the negative. Yes, of course we expect that there will be specific initiatives which will be introduced by specific countries, however I want to stress that this is not a checkbook summit, that the implementation of the plan of action which will be approved by the leaders will translate into some actual dollar outlay is inescapable but the first purpose of the six initiators is not to gather in New York on the weekend of the 29th presidents or prime ministers of developed countries who are going to say here's what I wish to contribute, because the Summit is concerned with the plight of children worldwide, not just children in Third World countries. I was listening with a great deal of interest to the introduction to our discussion here today and it occurred to me that the centre of the comments concerned children in the Third World. However, the Summit will be focusing also on the plight of children in the developed countries. In my own country there was a series of articles recently published in Canada which contained amongst other dramatic statements, at least from my perspective, the phrase that one out of six children in Canada go to bed hungry at night so this is not just a problem that concerns the Third World. It's a problem, children's problem, that concerns the whole world and that's why the whole world in effect will be in New York at the end of the month.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is **WORLD CHRONICLE.** Our guest is Yves Fortier, Ambassador of Canada to the United Nations and Co-Chairman of the Planning Committee for the World Summit for Children.

LESSING: Amb. Fortier, you say very properly that we shouldn't dwell specifically on the developing world but nevertheless a lot of the material that one reads from UNICEF and other UN agencies and other people who are concerned they talk a great deal about how important it is that the mothers of these children have the wherewithal to look after them and that means education, the ability to read, to have clean water and so on. Well now, I don't whether the Summit will address this but there is this question of male resistance in many societies to moving women into a rather more prominent position in society so that they are taking charge in areas that perhaps some of the men wouldn't want them to and you can say the same thing in the developed world. Education for girls isn't always necessarily at the same level as it is for education for boys. Now, do you think the Summit can look at these sorts of questions which are cultural more than anything else?

FORTIER: Yes. It's an excellent question and the answer is yes. In the preparatory process I can tell you there was a planning committee of course that was set up last December and there are two working groups of the planning committee. One is charged with the drafting of a declaration on the survival, protection and development of children and this cultural facet which you have just alluded to that children belong to women and not to men -- I mean I'm oversimplifying it but in effect I think that's as far as you were going -- is being addressed yes. And there will be an attempt in the declaration to try and deal with those fixations which do not belong to the '90s as far as the initiators are concerned. Already Judy, I can tell you that I see major changes in my own society, in my own country, in my own province, in my own family. My wife and I became grandparents just a few months ago and during the summer we had our daughter and her husband and our first grandchild in the house during a week's vacation and I was really impressed by the

way the mother and the father are sharing the chores today and I have no qualms in admitting that 30 years ago I was not as contributing a father if you wish to our children as my son-in-law. I was very impressed and I think it's a small example and I'm sorry for personalizing it but I believe that there is a consciousness which is now occurring in many, many countries of the world that children don't only belong to mothers, that they belong to families and the family unit is made up of a mother and a father, although there are monoparental families of course, but we hope that this problem will be addressed nationally. It will certainly be addressed internationally.

MORELLO: Mr. Ambassador, related to that is a question of religion in this thing. It strikes me as a point to be made I suppose that among the six initiators you have President Mubarak of Egypt who is having problems with Moslem orthodoxy, Prime Minister Bhutto who was having similar problems to some extent and President Salinas of Mexico who is having problems with the Catholic Church. Will the conference be addressing these things which are much deeper than simply cultural things that could be changed from washing dishes 30 years ago to not washing dishes today?

FORTIER: You know the Summit is not going to provide the answer to every "ill" which children suffer because of religion or because of a number of other factors but I think that the very fact that you pose the question and identified three of the six initiators who you say in their own country have problems associated with religious morés is evidence that the six initiators chose one another very carefully and hopefully, coming out of the Summit, will be a declaration which in some direct or indirect way is going to be a message that neither politics nor religion should be an impediment to the health and happiness of children.

COHEN: Ambassador, it seems clear that no real progress will be made in the impoverished Third World toward meeting the needs and saving the lives of children in the 1990s unless the industrialized countries provide, among other things, considerably more aid and debt relief than is currently being offered. How do you expect such sensitive issues to be dealt with at the Summit and if they are not dealt with don't you run the risk of the event being an exercise in rhetoric?

FORTIER: Well, specifically the Summit is not going to deal with the Third World debt crisis. There are fora where as you well know issues such as that one are addressed and the forum is not the World Summit for Children. However, you will certainly see in the declaration which is still being drafted, which is in the process of being drafted by the personal representatives of all the leaders who will be in New York at the end of the month, you will see a ringing declaration yes. Yes, rhetoric, which is going to call upon leaders of the developed world to contribute -- I said earlier this was not a checkbook Summit and I'm not going to speak dollars but I'm going to use this expression, to contribute additionality if you wish to the assistance, to the aid which they have already made and committed to the developing nations. There is no question that when one speaks about the scourge of children, the plight of children in the world that one of the causes, one of the obvious and painful causes is the poverty and what is the cause of poverty. Yes, in part it is the debt which has been accumulated in different circumstances at another time by the then government of that country but I repeat, and this has been accepted by all who are participating, developed and developing countries, the Summit is not going to come up with another Brady Plan. We don't believe that this is within the purview or the jurisdiction of the Summit but hopefully the national leaders who will be signing the declaration, who will be agreeing to the

implementation of the plan of action when they return home and cogitate on all those momentous decisions which have an impact on child survival in developing countries, will remember what they were told by their peers at the Summit.

LESSING: Amb. Fortier, it seems to me that you talk a great deal about the political leaders because they are the people who are coming to this Summit but what about the people at the grassroots level, the non-governmental organizations, how are you involving them?

FORTIER: The non-governmental organizations in the view of the initiators and indeed all members of the planning committee, have a very important role to play and they have been involved nationally. I can speak with some authority about the involvement of Canadian NGOs. There is a process which was put in place early this year and which in effect calls on the child focused NGOs in Canada to contribute through the government to the drafting of the declaration and they have contributed to the preparation of the plan of action. There will also be opportunities during that weekend for representatives of international NGOs to interface with the heads of some of the U.N. agencies like the World Bank or the IMF and the UNDP and so on as well as some of the leaders in order that their input can be directed specifically to the Summit. But even more important Judy, is the follow-up on the Summit because this has been made clear by the six initiators and all of those who are participating that this is not just an event which begins and ends the weekend of September 29th. All important, is going to be the implementation nationally of the plan of action and all important is going to be necessary participation by NGOs in every country. They will serve to remind the governments -- Prime Minister Mulroney, you were the co-chair of the Summit, you were there, remember what you said, now put it in place.

LITTLEJOHNS: Amb. Fortier, I'm afraid that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

Our guest has been Yves Fortier, Ambassador of Canada to the United Nations and Co-Chairman of the Planning Committee for the World Summit for Children. He was interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: Robert Cohen of the Latin America Feature Service; Judy Lessing of Radio New Zealand; and Ted Morello of the Christian Science Monitor.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

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